

## **DRAFT OP-ED ON THE PRESIDENT'S 2006 BUDGET**

*PREPARED BY THE OFFICE OF THE HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADER*

Democrats believe that on every issue our nation faces, it is our responsibility to ensure that the policies we pursue are consistent with the values we cherish. The Bush Administration's 2006 budget fails in every respect.

It is fiscally irresponsible, adding trillions to the deficit over the next 10 years. It is morally reprehensible, shortchanging veterans benefits and slashing funding for key homeland security, health care, and education initiatives. And the Bush Administration's failure to include details of its damaging Social Security privatization proposal and the cost of the war in Iraq is a failure to lead. Republicans are clearly out of touch with America's values and the real needs of families in [DISTRICT].

This fiscally irresponsible budget threatens our economy and the stability of the global economy because Republicans are unwilling to take the necessary steps toward fiscal responsibility – returning to responsible pay as you go rules and forgoing an additional round of tax breaks for the wealthy.

This morally reprehensible budget slashes funding for homeland security, veterans benefits, health care, and education initiatives serving every single American family. We need more cops on the street, but this budget cuts \$480 million from the COPS program, making it harder to keep the officers we have.

There is a whole new generation of veterans in Iraq and Afghanistan, but this budget makes them pay more for the health care and prescription drug benefits that they have earned through their service. And it fails to end the disabled veterans tax, which means that hundreds of thousands of veterans will continue to give up one dollar of their pension for every dollar of disability pay they receive.

During the past four years, the number of people without health insurance has increased by 5 million, but this budget cuts \$60 billion in health care funding for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, and includes policies that will lead hundreds of thousands of people to lose their health insurance. The proposal to expand enrollment in high-deductible health savings accounts would actually make the problem worse, increasing the number of Americans without insurance by 350,000.

States and local government are raising taxes in order to pay for public schools, but this budget fails to provide billions in promised education funding, denying millions of children the smaller classes, better teachers, and help with reading and math they need to succeed. It will leave millions of children behind.

Even if the Republican Congress let President Bush slash this domestic spending, the President's budget would still be deeply and dangerously lacking in fiscal discipline. It does nothing to address the record deficit of \$427 billion, and it does not even include funding for the two issues that dominated the President's State of the Union Address – Social Security and Iraq.

The President's budget also included no details on the Republican plan to privatize Social Security. In fact, his budget continues the raid on the Social Security Trust Fund, borrowing and spending all of the money from the Social Security Trust Fund over the next five years. His failure to provide a clear and honest accounting of the difficult trade-offs between increases in the debt, benefit cuts, and tax increases necessary to fund the White House's privatization proposal is a failure of leadership. Democrats stand ready to address the challenges facing Social Security, but the President must put forward a proposal that is fiscally responsible, fair, and does not slash benefits.

We know that the cost of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan will cost billions this year, but those costs are not accounted for in this budget. The American people deserve an honest accounting of the cost of this war.

President Bush's budget is an unfortunate step in the wrong direction and a clear indication of the price we pay for having a rubber stamp Republican majority in the House of Representatives. Democrats insist upon fiscal discipline with budgets that pay as you go, and over the coming months, we will fight for a budget that reflects the values of America's middle class: national security, prosperity, opportunity, fairness, community, and accountability. A responsible budget is the first step toward building a future worthy of the trust of the American people, the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform, and the aspirations of all of America's children.